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Records Management and Public Administration: The co-existence of the two within the city is an asset

Laura Okoroji

To conceptualize the fact that the Treaty of Guadalupe of 1848 occurred or that there was a Constitution drafted in 1787 would be difficult, if not for the evidence and records that prove these events to be true. The records that were preserved by someone from these time periods all support the theory and profession of records management, and without a public administrator to initiate the safeguarding of those records there would be no evidence to support history. The documents date as far back as the 1800's yet someone was able to establish a method of documenting and preserving the records so that future generations would be aware that the events truly occurred. In the late 1800's records management and Public Administration were understandably non-existent and still emerging ideas. The terminology that is now referred to as Records Management was just an event that occurred from one individual taking responsibility to preserve documents, or individuals who were good at managing information through various systems that were used during that time. Public Administration coincides with Records Management in the verity that it is administrators who serve the public that deal with the preservation of records, and need to be appositely ready for the task of managing a vast amount of records. Yes, there are some professionals that are armed with the title "Records Manager", and some that view records management as an avocation; to support their pack rat tendencies, but each employee in the City of Houston government has to be held accountable for the records of information that they encounter everyday.

In Records Management Quarterly 1998, Pemberton states that "Though unrealized within the field, records management has a very long history, one that begins almost 10,000 years before the emergence in the 1940s of a field that came to be called explicitly "records management." In fact, one could make the case that records

management precedes writing as we know it and thus is, technically, pre-historic. This is a rich and interesting history, the knowledge of which should add distinction to the field in the eyes of its practitioners, students, the public, and those peers and superiors with whom we work.” Records Management is an idea that stemmed long before anyone had begun studying about the preservation of records and how the principle technically functions. In 2008, what we think of as records were not necessarily true to say, 8000 B.C. Pemberton states that “what we think of as "writing," the first systematically produced records of business transactions were based on a clay-token system devised in the pre-literate Neolithic period of about 8000 B.C.E., or almost 10,000 years ago in the Tigris Euphrates Valley (now Iraq). Essential to the development of commerce beyond a trader's immediate locale, such records have been found in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Israel. These prototypical records are devoted solely to the affairs of business and government; clay-tablet records containing literary and religious texts came much later.” If indeed true, the Records Management profession that is now being studied as a new phenomenon has been prevalent around the world for centuries.

The idea of Public Administration in the United States has been a common concept in practice, but in theory did not become a science till 1887 when Woodrow Wilson wrote an article entitled the “The Study of Administration” Wilson wrote "it is the object of administrative study to discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do, and, secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy. The science of Public Administration was a theory used to study the act of public service that was already prevalent in United States communities; without a professional title to describe the work

being done. The profession usually described as the development, implementation and study of government branches of government policy. The term is linked to pursuing the public good by enhancing civil society and social justice. Wilson speaks about how public administrators can do tasks with the utmost possible efficiency and the least possible cost of money or energy, but in today's society Public Administrators are needed but government agencies are not providing public administrators adequate resources for public administrators to do their jobs adequately.

Records management is a document that serves as evidence of an activity or transaction performed by the organization and that requires attention for some time period. Records management done properly, can be an asset to Government institutions like the City of Houston, some of the steps that are instrumental in records management is ensuring that the organization participating in records management knows what information that should be considered records, how active documents that will soon become records should be handled while they are still in use, and how they should be collected once they are declared to be records. The government needs to determine in what manner and for how long each record type should be retained to meet legal, business and regulatory requirements. Although, centuries ago technology in regards to records management would have been an anachronism, but in today's day and age; in the managing of records the City of Houston would benefit from an implementation of technological solutions and business processes that will help to ensure that the organization complies with its record management obligations in a cost effective way. In order to have records management work passably the city needs to implement a process in which record related tasks such as disposing of expired records or locating and

protecting records related to external events can be done more effectively. The City Secretary keeps a large majority of records that pertain to the City of Houston, but in order for the records management to work effectively each Public Administrator i.e. employee of the city needs to ensure that documents needing to be preserved are safely transported to the City Secretaries office.

While government offices maintain an extensive amount of records and information, Public Administrators must be able to locate records and information quickly for the successful flow of government operations. Records are the evidence of what a government or any other type of agency does. Record keeping done properly are important to a government agency and can be kept in several formats that would benefit the City of Houston in the effect that records can be located faster and the city appears to be more efficient in the eyes of the public. The most common form of record documentation is physical paper in files such as memos, contracts, reports and correspondence. In today's day email messages and attachments can also be a form of public records. The mission of a Public Administrator in regards to Records Management is to ensure that records are adequately placed within the city, in locations that can be assessed twenty years from now. In order for records to be managed effectively the city needs Public Administrators that are productive, effective managerial decision makers, and also seeking a greater ability to control costs for the City of Houston.

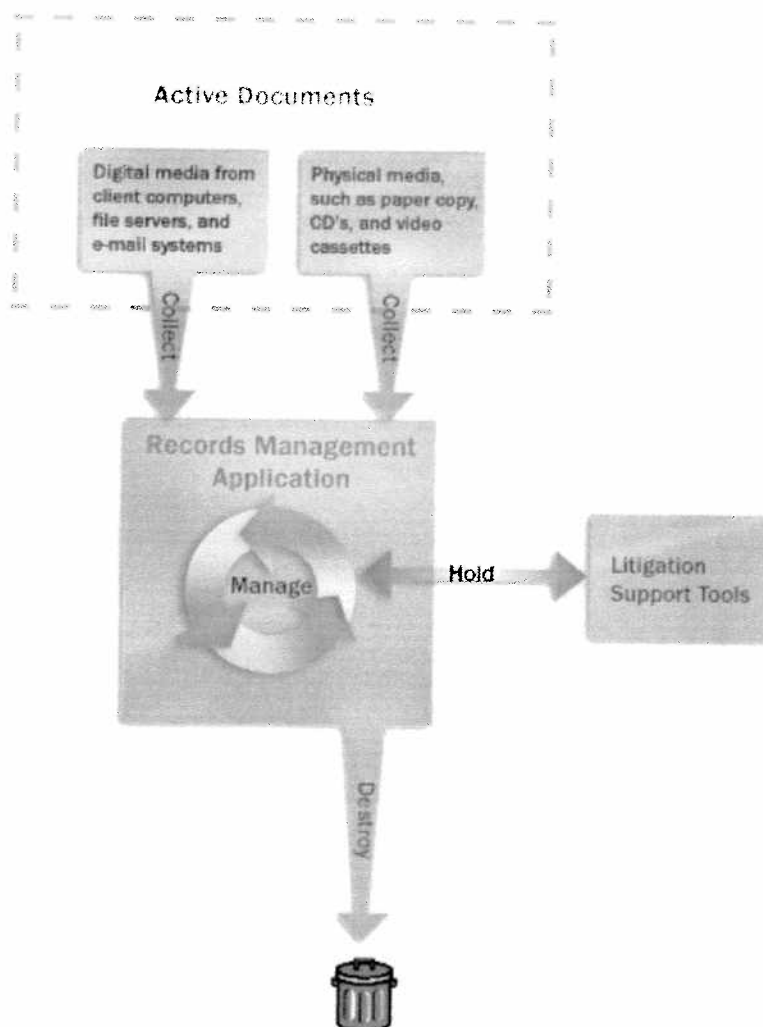
As an intern, for the City of Houston, Pubic Works and Engineering division for the Code Enforcement department I had the responsibility to research and locate old codes that were missing in the codebooks. The majority of my research took place at the City Secretaries office and I began to think how can codes be effectively managed, and a

system has to exist in which records can be kept in an organized manner to prevent losing code ordinances from previous years. Although, current city employees are doing their best to preserve codebooks as they are updated, the City of Houston Code Enforcement section revises the codes every three years. In previous years it was done less frequently when government officials thought it was necessary. In probing through the vast amount of codebooks I thought to myself, that it is remarkable that at hand were books in the library that dated from the 1940's, and wondering who had the intuitive notion to retain these books for the further use of new code enforcement administrators. The thought then made me wonder if there was a Public Administrator that was in charge of the management of records and if so what happened to the various codes that are missing. In order to ensure that history does not repeat itself records need to be more adequately managed in the City of Houston. I believe that each department would benefit from a specific professional in their department that advertises wise records management to other employees through flyers and daily emails that remind employees of the importance of storing emails and documents, and being persistent in the fact that proper preservation can be of further use to the next generation. The City of Houston has made use of some record management systems such as Iron Mountain products; boxes that are specifically used to store records and organize documents the use of this system is adequate and helps keep some form of order to the large amount of documents that come in and out of the City Secretaries office. A first-rate records management system has to include the following: a system to store and destroy records that will benefit the city and also keep public records private. All of this being said there has to be a reflection to centuries prior to technological advancement, and the city should question how an

immense majority of records are still available for use in present day without all the technological advancement in the past. The self proclaimed records manager took it upon themselves to ensure that histories documentations were being conserved. The most negative aspect to all of the technology that is available in present day America is that technology changes so often, that information saved in a Word Database of 2003, may not be compatible to whichever new system that will be in use 20 years from now. In thinking about that I began to think that the best method of Records Management is one in which information is written down and stored. The downfall to such a system is that Public Administrators will have to be effective in writing down all information, and that is a tasking assignment.

The City of Houston can implement a system in which all employees can put their records in one database that is linked throughout all city systems. The database will be a link that each city department has on their computer that will enable them to click and send all information to the proper location so that it can be sifted through and placed in the proper folder. The database can work as a filter that keeps records for a certain amount of years and then discards of records, but not permanently. The database will keep destroyed records in a separate soon to be trashed database that will be kept for a couple of years after the discarding date. The record management system could include elements such as a content analysis that will categorize the information that will become records and provide a descriptive way in which the contents will be move to the database records. Also, a File plans to describe each type of record in the system, and where they should be retained as record. There should also be in place a method for collecting records that are no longer active such as files and email systems, whereas there should be

a method to audit records while they are active (technet). Records are very important to city governments and should be kept sensibly. The maltreatment of a record could result in lawsuits or lack of information during an emergency. A sample Record management system is demonstrated below. Observe how records are destroyed at the end of use. I do not fully agree with the destroying of records because I feel as if they might be very pertinent in later use in regards to the application of records in the city that might need to be reused or reanalyzed for further assistance in a new task, and for historical interest. The diagram carefully demonstrates the use of the Records Management system that will be effective.



The only aspect that the figure is missing is the importance of Public Administrators in the aspect of Records Management. Public Administrators need to be placed at the beginning of the cycle to demonstrate the importance of employees feeding the information into the database.

As an intern I have witnessed the importance of Record Management, and it is a very necessary asset to any organization. I believe that Public Administrators now need to take a closer look into how they can effectively manage and protect the records that pass through their hands everyday. The records management theory even though it has existed before our time it is a fairly new profession and is forthrightly a part of each City of Houston's employee job description; to ensure that records that come through the hands of each city employee is personally secured and adequately maintained. In proper managing of records the city can guarantee that a record is doing what it is supposed to do, allowing the people that come after you an example of the work that was done before, how things can be done differently, and safeguarding the city from lawsuits due to lack of inadequately kept records. So when asked how you can know if something really happened in the past, or if a document was really changed, all that needs to be done is for the record to be pulled by a city employee. In having quick access to record the City of Houston Public Administrators and the City of Houston have improved the efficiency of their work, and are able to have the tools necessary to provide excellent service.